An AAPI Haven: A Virtual Sanctuary and Brand Empowerment Initiative

Katrina Lin

Taylor Tran

GRC 462: Senior Project

Hocheol Yang

March 20, 2023

An AAPI Haven: A Virtual Sanctuary and Brand Empowerment Initiative

The project focuses on creating a brand identity for the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community of San Luis Obispo (SLO). The branding begins with research and analysis of the target audience and the organization's mission statement and values. This information is used to develop a brand strategy that aligns with the organization's goals and resonates with the AAPI community. The brand identity, including the logo, colors, and visual elements, is then created to reflect the organization's brand strategy and appeal to the target audience (Tarver, 2023). The brand guidelines ensure consistency in all marketing and communication materials. Overall, creating a strong and cohesive brand for the AAPI SLO organization is crucial for building trust and engagement with the community and achieving the organization's goals of unity and visibility. The second component of the proposed project aims to create a safe space for Asian American individuals to anonymously report hate incidents they have experienced. The primarily virtual platform will provide a safe space for AAPI folks in the community to submit details of the incident, including the type of incident, location, and any other relevant information. Focusing on designing with the environment in mind, the AAPI brand and space will be welcoming and safe, reflecting the purpose that the organization and platform are created to serve. The submissions will be stored safely with the AAPI SLO organization and resources for support will be provided. Additionally, the platform will feature resources for Asian American individuals, including information on legal rights and mental health support. This project aims to address the rising incidence of hate crimes against Asian Americans and empower individuals to speak out against discrimination in a county where they may not feel empowered to.

Evidently, symbols, colors, and typography sends "a story about the place and the people behind it" and the design choices made especially in a virtual space should ensure that visitors have a positive experience (Fabianski, 2022). The proposed virtual platform will be designed with the identity and purpose of the environment at the center of every design choice, as this platform will serve as much more than merely an incident report form. The virtual space will also address digital privacy in marginalized communities. In order to protect the identities of AAPI community members and keep the virtual space safe and comfortable for people to submit hate incidents, the platform will be clearly connected to the AAPI SLO organization. "Safety should not mean having to come offline", so for AAPI SLO as well as AAPI community members and students, having an online forum or submission platform that is not connected to higher authorities is crucial for the community (Tennent, 2021).

Graphic Communication Theory: Collective Identity

A trend in Graphic Communication Theory is a collective identity. A collective identity is the feeling of belonging that people experience when they are part of a group. It is the idea that a person's feelings, behaviors, and attitudes can be influenced by the dynamics of the social groups they reside in (Snow, 2002). Design elements of a collective identity can be used to create a more recognizable look for the organization. Organizations can also use collective identity to improve their communication strategies, build brand loyalty, and grow their business. By creating a visual identity that represents the shared experiences and beliefs of the group, a sense of connection can be developed. Colors play a significant role when it comes to creating a collective identity. Use of specific colors can evoke a range of emotions and associations that can help create a distinct and recognizable identity. Colors can also have cultural or historical significance. For example,

the color red in East Asian cultures is seen as lucky (Stuart, 2020). It is often incorporated in materials for weddings, Lunar New Year, and lanterns. On the other hand, in Western cultures, red signifies danger, which can be seen in stop signs and stop lights. Choosing the right type can help to convey a group's personality. Typography makes it possible to create specific contexts and personalities. By using the perfect typeface, it is possible to make something that is modern, vintage, romantic, or fun (T.L.C., 2019). Symbols and imagery can be used for communicating a collective identity through the use of logos, icons, or other visual elements that may represent shared beliefs, values, or experiences.

A current trend of collective identity in Graphic Communication is visual storytelling. Through visual storytelling and thoughtful graphics, brands have the ability to create an emotional connection with their audience, which in turn builds brand loyalty and a sense of collective identity. The set of visible elements that help an organization convey its brand message can be split up into two categories; basic elements of the design including typography, colors, and icons and other visual content such as images or other marketing collateral (Denys, 2019). Powerful and effective visual storytelling allows individuals to make associations and connections with a brand because of the ways in which humans perceive information. Visual information processes faster than text and can exponentially increase traffic on an online platform. The way a brand presents itself almost immediately informs the audience of its intentions and message, giving a brand with effective visual design a competitive advantage over a brand with less compelling visual storytelling. Through visuals that depict diverse individuals and experiences, brands can help to break down barriers and promote greater understanding and acceptance.

Inclusivity in marketing campaigns and branding is also rapidly growing in importance. Graphics and visuals that include real people with multiple and diverse identities are crucial to elevate the voices of people and groups that are not typically represented (Optimizely, 2022). This is particularly important in marginalized communities where individuals may feel isolated or disconnected from mainstream society. Through visuals that depict diverse individuals and experiences, brands can help to break down barriers and promote greater understanding and acceptance. In a globalized world with ever-growing connections, designers and the graphic communication community should be at the forefront of incorporating diverse perspectives into visual messages.

Surveillance is another element directly related to collective identity and the impacts of visual design. In an age of unprecedented surveillance through modern technology and increasing privacy concerns, marginalized communities remain vulnerable to physical, mental, and institutional harm (Green & Gilman). Attempts from larger institutions and the government to control marginalized groups suggest the need for surveillance reform to restore the dignity and autonomy of marginalized peoples. Creating digital spaces with visual design that reflect the good intentions of an organization is one step in preserving the autonomy of vulnerable populations in a surveillance society. Spaces like this tell the users that there are safe platforms for them to share, explore, connect, and make changes.

Synthesis

In order to create a cohesive brand identity for AAPI SLO, it is important to understand the unique experiences, values, and perspectives of the community. While there are shared experiences and values within the community, it is important to recognize and respect the

diversity in branding efforts. Highlighting the mutual experiences and values is important in order to create a sense of collective identity and community.

Many AAPI brands use the color red as a form of representation due to the meaning associated with it in East Asian cultures. However, it is important to remember that there are many other ethnicities within the Asian American Pacific Islander community in SLO. Therefore, using a more colorful palette can help better represent the many cultures encompassed under the umbrella. During the process of selecting a suitable typeface, the brand's desired image of being perceived as friendly and approachable was taken into consideration. Sans-serif fonts are usually used for these types of brands due to their modern and straightforward look (Pluralsight, 2023). Additionally, the ease of readability and accessibility of the font was a significant factor. "Neurath" is a free sans-serif font that can be easily accessed for AAPI SLO.

In terms of visual storytelling to enhance the collective identity that is AAPI SLO, the main goals of AAPI SLO's branding is to increase awareness and communicate with community members that this organization is a safe and caring one that users can completely trust. This is especially crucial in a vulnerable population such as Asian-Americans and Pacific-Islanders. In a predominantly white area of California and at a predominantly white institution, AAPI SLO wants to set a positive reputation for the organization in order to make the changes that they want to in the social justice space.

As a new organization meant to serve an underrepresented community, AAPI SLO's branding should reflect the values and identities of Asian-American and Pacific-Islander peoples. Thinking authentically and building tangible goals for the organization, starting with emphasizing meaning in the branding, will allow AAPI SLO to successfully pioneer change for

AAPI folks in Central California. Designing with diversity in mind means prioritizing the audience's perspective, avoiding tropes, and being patient with the design process (Pryor, 2017).

For the purposes of digital privacy, AAPI SLO's design and online platform for incident hate reports must communicate the emotion of trust with users. Visual tools such as shapes, colors, and typography will contribute to community members feeling secure enough to use AAPI SLO resources and platforms (Madmin, 2022). The visual design of the online platform must reflect that AAPI SLO is an independent grassroots organization built by the community for the community.

Results

The color palette used creates a sense of visual harmony and coherence that makes the platform feel familiar and trustworthy. Users can feel a sense of safety and security from seeing colors that remind them of home, allowing users to feel more comfortable about sharing their personal experiences. The cohesiveness of the new branding also allows AAPI SLO to create and maintain trust in the community through consistent marketing collateral and signage.

The link to the hate incident reports can be accessed easily through a QR code. The report form created on Typeform and the design of the questionnaire aligns with the carefully curated color palette that aims to reflect the identity of several Asian communities. Reports will be collected anonymously and specific AAPI SLO personnel will be able to view and assess reports.

Link to hate incident report form:

https://o5qogvnuaju.typeform.com/to/PGNKClXj

Brand Guidelines:

Conclusion

The colors instill a sense of nostalgia, which are important in creating a sense of familiarity to users which can help them feel a sense of comfort or ease. For AAPI SLO, it was crucial to select an inclusive color palette that represents the diversity of the audience. For other elements like icons, it was taken into account of culturally relevant symbols that align with AAPI SLO's identity. Fruits have a deep cultural significance in many Asian cultures, with meaning such as prosperity, luck, and even the unsaid words of "love" in many Asian American families. The incorporation of the relevant symbols and colors helped create a collective identity for AAPI SLO and a brand identity that feels authentic and relatable to the target audience.

People can use the questionnaire to bring light to their personal experiences, where AAPI SLO will then give these experiences exposure so more people are aware of these situations. By creating a user-friendly experience through Typeform, users feel comfortable sharing their

stories, leading to more accurate and detailed reports. Typeform's use of micro interactions also increase user engagement and help ensure that the reports collected are as informative and useful as possible.

Reflection & Limitation

An issue regarding the project was defining the scope. It was helpful to create a timeline at the beginning of the project and modify it along the line in order to adjust the scope and create a new schedule for the project. Creating a cohesive brand strategy that includes design and visual identity is challenging as it is crucial to ensure that all elements of the brand align with the organization's values and goals. Along with project progress timing, brand guidelines require time for revisions, feedback, and ideating. Because we were in contact with the founders of AAPI SLO throughout this project, we continually have to present and receive feedback for our designs to ensure that they accurately represent and communicate the mission and values of the brand.

Additionally, a limitation with our hate incident report was overlapping jurisdiction over sensitive data and who gets to collect and process it. AAPI SLO had to receive permission and have several meetings with Central Coast councils in order to create a form as a grassroots organization. Because the data collected contains sensitive information, we have to make sure that our database is robust enough to hold and protect the user information. We also must limit who has access to the info and regulate what the collected data will be used for. Our form is also anonymous to protect the identities of the users, but since hate incidents are the subject being reported about, it will be difficult to follow up on and investigate reports. The anonymity of the report may make it challenging to provide support or resources to the victim or to take legal

action against the perpetrator. So while anonymous reports can provide a channel for reporting

hate incidents, they may not always be the most effective means of addressing hate speech and

discrimination online.

Citations

Brand inclusivity: Diversity and inclusion in marketing campaigns. Optimizely. (2022, May 3).

Retrieved from https://www.optimizely.com/insights/blog/inclusive-marketing/

Denys, I. (2019, October 7). *How visual identity impacts branding & UX and why it matters*.

millermedia7. Retrieved from

https://millermedia7.storychief.io/visual-identity-impacts-branding-ux

Green, R., & Gilman, M. (n.d.). *The surveillance gap: The harms of extreme privacy and data*

marginalization. N.Y.U. Review of Law & Social Change. Retrieved from

https://socialchangenyu.com/review/the-surveillance-gap-the-harms-of-extreme-privacy-

and-data-marginalization/

Madmin. (2022, May 4). *How to convey trust and care via Graphic Design: Award Winning &*

Affordable Logo Design Specialist: Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Perth & Adelaide.

Award Winning & Affordable Logo Design Specialist | Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne,

Perth & Adelaide. Retrieved from

https://danielsim.com/how-to-convey-trust-and-care-via-graphic-design/

Pryor, A. (2017, April 18). *Representation matters: How to design with diversity in mind*.

Medium. Retrieved from

https://medium.com/fifth-tribe-stories/design-with-diversity-in-mind-d96cbd62ba93

✏, T. L. C. (2019, July 11). *Why typography is important in branding*. Medium. Retrieved

February 26, 2023, from

https://thelogocreative.medium.com/why-typography-is-important-in-branding-1eebe65c
d8fb

Snow, D. (2002, December 20). *Collective identity and expressive forms*. eScholarship,

University of California. Retrieved February 27, 2023, from

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2zn1t7bj

Stuart, J. (2020, March 25). *Chinese red*. Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art.

Retrieved February 26, 2023, from https://asia.si.edu/red/

Tarver, E. (2023, January 19). *Brand identity: What it is and how to build one*. Investopedia.

Retrieved February 27, 2023, from

https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/brand-identity.asp#:~:text=Key%20Takeaways-,B

rand%20identity%20is%20the%20visible%20elements%20of%20a%20brand%2C%20su

ch,and%2C%20therefore%2C%20consistent%20sales.

What is serif and sans serif? Pluralsight. (2023, January 3). Retrieved February 27, 2023, from

https://www.pluralsight.com/blog/creative-professional/meaning-behind-chosen-typeface